

FREMANTLE TOWN

by Basil Garrity

I'm a native of Fremantle and I have been all my life
And like a lot of other folks, I've had my share of strife
But what a place to have it, for it's sure been worth the fun
To grow up in good old Freo, near the sea and 'neath the sun.

I remember all the good times when the place was pretty small
And the folks were poor but simple, but were proud and they stood tall.
For they'd lived through a depression and with strength had passed the test
The men and women of Fremantle were equal to the best.

The trams, they ran in those days, it was transport at its best
You could travel north and south and east but never to the west.
And everybody used them if they didn't have to walk
You were sure to meet a friend and enjoy a bit of talk.

On Sunday, in the summer when the days were very hot
A penny transfer ticket would take you to a spot
Where the day would be a corker, you could run or fish or swim
And if you had another penny a prize you just might win.

For out South in the thirties, there were lots of things to do
The place was always crowded and you rarely saw a blue.
There was Hoop-las, Hittem Knockems, games for young and old
And for just another penny you could have your fortune told.

The swimming it was bonzer when the days were hot and warm
And the kids took full advantage while the folks yarned upon the lawn.
Then tired, burnt and cranky, you would board the trams with moans
And another transfer ticket would take you to your home.

And to go into Fremantle for a ride and kill some time
Was sure worth another penny for the fun that you would find.
You could stand upon the corner down at High and Market Street
And be sure to see Black Paddy coming in his bare feet.

A stockman at Robbs Jetty, he was known by everyone
And everybody liked him, he was just so full of fun.
He was always neat and tidy with a smile upon his face
It was really good to know him, a credit to his race.

And remember Sandshoe Willy, silly grin upon his face
He would scoot around old Freo at a most amazing pace.
He would glide along the pavement with his eyes upon the ground
Then you'd see him stoop and rise again and quickly look around.

For he'd just picked up a bumper, or if you prefer a butt
And if you continued watching, you'd see him light it up.
Then his eyes would grow all starry and he'd start his silly grin
He was happy in the knowledge that he'd had another win.

There was also Percy Buttons, he would sometimes come to town
And for just two bob this character would act just like a clown.
He would throw back flips and somersaults and other types of tricks
You would just as likely see him any night outside the flicks.

With his hat upon the pavement upside down to catch the trays
He would entertain the people in a dozen different ways.
I used to gaze in wonder as he threw himself around
For he had a mighty hernia that nearly reached the ground.

And there was Two Bob Andy in his battered tattered coat
A scary looking joker and considered quite a joke.
You would find him at the Derbies standing in among the mob
And to ask him who will win today was always "~~South~~ two bob".
EASTS

Another old well known local, with strong Fremantle ties
Was a chap that lived near the Plympton and was known as Jimmy Four Eyes.
With his cart he would walk round the district his way to make a few bob
He would sharpen your knives and scissors, yes that was old Jimmy's job.

There was also another fellow who seemed out of place in our town
He was always dressed quite fancy and a good bloke to be around.
An expert on the piano, Joe Ward was known by all
He delighted the people of Freo, in their homes, a pub or a hall.

A remittance man from the Old Dart, was the story I was told
He lived in a shed in North Freo, that in winter sure would have been cold.
But the cold it did not deter him in fact he paid it no heed
No rugs or blankets did Joe have, but layers of dry seaweed.

The kids of the town all knew him, they really liked him a lot
And on meeting, the first thing they asked him was "Please sing us Dickory Dock".
But he scored a hit with us youngsters, this man in the fancy dats
For he always made sure when he met you, that he had a bag full of black cats.

And near the Freo Station was a bloke that had no peer
His name was Tinny Thomas, famous for his ginger beer.
He sold it from a fancy cart with openings at the side
Rather like the type in which the gypsies used to ride.

And across the road from Tinnys was a place we all knew well
A taxi rank that ran for years and known as Marion Bells.
I used to often wonder who had money for such trips
But then I found the answer, wealthy tourists from the ships.

While up the road a little, another fellow could be found
A real important bloke was he, the Mayor of Freo Town.
Frank Gibson was his name, though later he became Sir Frank
'Twas chaps like him who shaped the place and whom we ought to thank.

And across the road from Gibsons, we could spend time at the flicks
A large imposing building that was built of solid bricks.
So when in town you walk along the Mall, look up and see
The original face of the Majestic and the letters in steel, MT.

In later years, when the theatre was finished and closed its doors
It became well known and popular as a Coles Department Store.
We had lost a place of enjoyment, where we used to watch the flicks
But we gained a fancy place to shop, with nothing over two and six.

There was also the Princess Theatre along in Market Street
And the Saturday morning kids show was always a pretty good treat.
Still being used to this very day, but I find it hard to bear
That this place we loved and enjoyed so much is now used for car repairs.

And down the road a couple of blocks was a place known as Ugly Land
But I never did get behind the fence to learn of its joys first hand.
I'm told there was boxing and wrestling, concerts and plays and things
So maybe some old codger with some info, may find time to give me a ring.

When today I walk through the markets, I remember how it used to be
Horses and carts lined up with their produce, the smell of vegies, fruit and horses' pee.
But its good to see it still standing and not smashed and torn to the ground
For the people flock there in their thousands to buy or to look around.

How many remember the old days and the horses that pulled the large drays
From the wharf to the large brick storehouses of which many are standing today.
Yes those beautiful large strong Clydesdales clip clopping along the street
Such a vision of strength and beauty in the rain, the wind and the heat.

It brings to my mind as I'm dreaming, of a spot where they stopped for a drink
So come on you old Freo people, you'll remember if you just think.
Well you know where His Majesty's Pub is on the corner of Phillimore Street
There were horse troughs in the middle of the roadway and a place where the drivers
could meet.

Yes there's one still left in our city that's been saved I'm glad to say
That reminds us of what we grew up with and don't see a lot of today.
Yes the horse trough restored to such beauty, down the bottom of Market Street
Gives an old Freo bloke such fond memories and also a memorable treat.

But I mustn't forget old North Freo, for it brings back old memories to me
For how many remember the Tar Pots and just where they used to be.
Well the train bridge way back in the thirties was West of where it sits today
And between the bridge and the North Wharf that's where they used to lay.

I remember the Chinese Gardens over North on the river's edge
The old Chinese codgers that worked them with their yokes and large hats on their
heads.
With their trousers rolled up to their knee caps, from their buckets, they'd water the rows
Or you'd see them preparing a section, and all they would use would be hoes.

Remember sometimes in the winter when the river, boy she used to rise
Well, I'd go over North for a tram ride and couldn't believe my own eyes.
For the garden the Chinese had tended and nurtured with such loving care
Was completely covered by water, yes the garden was no longer there.

But this setback, it did not deter them, these hard working men from the north
For as soon as the water receded, they would then set about to bring forth.
A garden again in its glory and in no time again you would see
The sprouts of the vegies appearing where the flood waters used to be.

And next to the garden in those days, was a factory we all knew so well
It was known as the Pearces Boot Factory and, boy, remember the smell
Of the hides they prepared in the tin sheds and hung on the racks to dry
Before making the boots and the sandals for us Freo people to buy.

But Christmas Eve in Freo, in the days of long ago
Was an evening to remember, all the family used to go.
For final Christmas shopping or to meet a friend in town
Or just to mingle with the mob and have a walk around.

The pavements were all crowded with the laughing happy throng
While from the front bar of the National someone would give voice to song.
And before the night was over, one thing you did for sure
Was to make your way to William Street about near Wrightson's door.

There standing in the roadway, painted white and neat and clean
Was a lovely hawker's barrow, the best you'd ever seen
Cooked prawns was all he sold you know, at fourpence a large pot
And over in old St Johns Square they really hit the spot.

While along from Wrightsons, next to Swanseas was a shop
And every time I went to town, in front of it I'd stop.
For in those days, the items that were hanging on the walls
I'd only seen on Grand-dad's farm in all the horses' stalls.

For the shop was full of harnesses, saddles and bridles too
Not the usual type I'd seen though, but bright and shiny new.
The scent of new worked leather was always heavy in the air
I guess that's why I always stopped outside to stand and stare.

And remember round South Terrace, there was quite a vegie shop
Run by another Freo bloke and known as just Chin Hop.
It's the memory of the likes of him that makes Freo such a place
Yes, full of decent people of every colour, creed and race.

I remember, with my brother going fishing down the quay
We would usually make a day of it, my brother, mates and me.
And when we tired of fishing, there were other things you know
You could sit and watch the ships come in and even see 'em go.

And when we'd finished fishing, we'd walk the railway track
Our fishing bags, my mates and I and my big brother Jack.
And round about Dalgety's were great stacks of sandalwood
The scent that drifted up from them was really something good.

While further round the river, as for home we made our way
We'd likely stop at Gourley's place to swim or just to play.
And if you saw old Robin at the gate or down the lane
You'd just as likely get from him, a stick of sugar cane.

But did you ever spend a Sunday down old Point Walter way
For if you did, you must agree, It was really quite a day.
You could catch a little billy-cart tram outside the Leopold Pub
And sit and wait for the ride to start with your bathers and your grub.

And what a corker ride it was when the trammie let her fly
As you tried to catch the bushes as they went racing by.
The place was always crowded, groups were spread out all around
The people came by car and boat to this beaut picnic ground.

And when you'd finished swimming and running round the beach
You'd scoot along the foreshore to a place called Blackwall Reach
Where all the kids were pirates, climbing round and acting brave
And if someone had a candle, you could then explore a cave.

And when the sun began to set, the crabbing would begin
While in the dark the fires would glow beneath the kero tin.
The night would be full of laughter and singing on the beach
And the knowledge of such a tasty treat brought us scurrying back from the reach.

About this time the dads returned, wash tubs filled to the brim
And everyone would gather around while they threw the blueys in.
But what a way to end your day, eating crabs down at the spit
While all agreed when they'd had their feed the day had been a hit.

I wish I could remember more of long forgotten days
And how we used to spend our time in long forgotten ways.
There was no need to tear about in fancy cars and things
'Cos life was slow when you had no dough, but you had what mateship brings.

You remember the Emerald, the Zephyr, the Val boats when they used to run
And take us on boat trips and picnics and places where life was fun.
It may not seem much to the new chum or visitors to our old town
But to old Freo folks with long memories, they'd remember if they're still around.

It's nice to remember how things were in the good old yesteryear
And I often sit and think and dream and it almost brings a tear.
But in years to come when I'm growing old, and the new ways get me down
I can still reflect and be proud to know, I grew up in Freo town.

*Best regards
Basil Garity*